

God in Three Persons

Sunday 16 August 2009 – Rev Lance Thomas
Romans 28:16-20

A school teacher had identical twin girls arrive in her class of new entrants. She said to the girls, 'my golly you *are* alike, how does your mother tell you apart?' One of the girls looked at her somewhat bemused and said, 'it's easy, we have different names.'

We have spent quite a number of weeks looking at what we can know about the living God. Today we end this series by looking at the way God has revealed himself in three persons. The doctrine of the trinity. Some people's reaction to the trinity is to say, that is so hard for us to get our heads around, how can we understand it. This teaching has been central to the faith throughout history. A fourth century theologian called Gregory of Nazianzus (how's that for a name?); Gregory said, 'when I say God, I mean Father, Son and Holy Spirit.' Probably the greatest theologian from last century Karl Barth used to say, 'Trinity is the Christian name for God.'

Our belief in God as being Father, Son and Holy Spirit distinguishes us as Christians who know and worship the true and living God. But if it is so hard for us to get our heads around how can we be expected to understand it. I want to be like one of the those twin girls and say to you - it's easy! Another theologian John Owen said, it is a matter of revelation not explanation and therefore we should be content to listen to scripture. We may *know* that God is three in one rather than *how* he is. It's not so much trying to understand, but more of humbly listening to the word of God and grasping the truth.

We have said God's word, his self revelation, is given to us in the scriptures of the Old and New Testament and the person of Jesus. If we go to the scriptures we won't find the word Trinity. That may be true but if we go to the scriptures we sure as heck find the Trinity!

In Creation

God the Father spoke : *Genesis 1:3* God said let there be light.

God the Son was the Word spoken 'In the beginning was the word.' *John 1:1*

God the Holy Spirit 'moved on the face of the waters' *Genesis 1:3*

In the Incarnation,

The Word made flesh, God the Father 'gave his only son' *John 3:16*

God the Son was born into the world. *Luke 2:11*

God the Spirit came upon Mary to cause her conception, *Luke 1:35*

In Redemption

Being put right with God

God the Father : accepts the sacrifice of Calvary – *Hebrews 9:14*

God the son offers himself as our substitute *Hebrews 9:14*

God the Spirit, Jesus offers himself through the Spirit – *Hebrews 9:14*

In Salvation

God the Father : receives the prodigal son, welcomes the sinner – *Luke 15:22*. Forgives him, supplies him with a robe, a ring, a feast.

God the Son : is the shepherd that goes in search of the lost sheep – *Luke 15:4*

God the Spirit : seals the new covenant – *Ephesians 1:13*

In Communion with God

God the Father invites us to come to him for fellowship – *Ephesians 2:18*

God the Son is the reconciliation (us and God) *2 Corinthians 5:19*

God the Spirit effects the union and communion *Ephesians 2:18*

In Prayer

God the father is the one who receives our prayers *John 16:23*

God the Son is the one in whose name we pray *John 16:23*

God the Spirit directs us in our requests *Romans 8:26*

In the End

God the Father receives the Kingdom *1 Corinthians 15:24*

God the Son changes our bodies into his likeness *Philippians 3:21*

God the Spirit gives the invitation *Revelation 22:17* The Spirit and the Bride say come. And let him who hears say come. Whoever wishes let him take the free gift of the water of life.'
Revelation 22:17

I think we get the picture.

The revelation of scripture is that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Three personal identities within the one Godhead. It's important to note that God is a personal Trinity within a numerical unity. The distinction is personal, not mathematical. Some have scoffed that in mathematics $1+1+1=3$ but in Christian theology $!+!+=1$. In other words Christianity is illogical, absurd.

But the teaching is not that God is mathematically 3 in 1 but that he is personally 3 in 1. The one God exists externally as three distinctions – Father, Son and Holy Spirit, each of which exercise the fullness of God.

Where would we be without this truth? How much of God would we know personally if we had never heard of Jesus Christ or if he had never come into the world. For many people God is a dark and distant deity precisely because they do not know the Father in the Son. How close would we personally be to God in love and obedience if the Holy Spirit had not been given to the work of rebirth, of creating us anew.

It is because of the third person of the trinity that we know God as our God. It is because of the Spirit that a person becomes a Christian, continues as a Christian and grows into the fullness of God.

Without the truth of the Trinitarian being of God, our knowledge of God would be so much poorer and our understanding of the way of salvation in Christ would be impossible.

The truth of the revelation of God as three persons, rather than confuse us, if just humbly accepted as revealed in the scripture, brings light into the darkness. How do we understand a God who in his essence is one but in expression is three? Easy – he has different names. Some of you have read the book 'The Shack' by William P Young. If you haven't and want to I'm sure there are plenty of copies around. If you are one of those who got some way into it then stopped, as I did for a while, I recommend you rip back into it. It's worth the effort. I am not going to reveal the story, but I do want to comment on one of the major aspects of the book - its presentation of the relationship within the Godhead. The love of the Father for the Son and Spirit, likewise the Son for the Father and Spirit, Spirit for the Father and Son. This bit of fiction demonstrates the reality of community, unity, love, that exists within God.

This is hugely important for us as a church, as the people of God. The scripture tells us that we are people created in the image of God. As people created in the image and likeness of a three person God, we are created to live in fellowship with others. In God there is both unity and diversity and he has so structured human life that the delightful diversity of humanity is designed to be expressed in unity. This is a message not just for the church but for all humanity. We are created to be in community. To be a part of each other. Our society in the last 50 years or so has championed individualism, has encouraged people to become a law unto themselves. What's right for me is right. What is best for me and maybe my family is what is best. This has created a chronic loneliness in our society. The quicker the world's population grows, the more alone we seem to be. Certainly in our Western world, with the splintering of families, all over the world, the loss of neighbourhood communities, the loss of the village lifestyle, the image of relationships that are lived through the television and cyberspace world, the proliferation of human contact that is too busy, too cautious, too self absorbed to go beyond the superficial. All of this creates an aloneness that denies the heart of our creation. And even the most successful in our society's terms often achieve this success by emotionally disconnecting and often physically separating, from anything but a community of their choosing. A world where there is less and less community, unity and love. How crucially important within the church then is the church's call to be the body of Christ. That in our diversity, we exercise a unity that reflects the trinity of God. A body where different members combine to achieve the life-in-community that God wants for us which he himself has always lived.

In the trinity, the church is the hope of the world. Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Can we speak to a world of the creator God without detailing the presence of that God in the person of Jesus and will we find the words to say that will be received by listening ears without the power of the Spirit. The answer is no!
The revelation of the living God is the revelation of the creating Father, the person of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.
Amen